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ABSTRACT

Pros and cons are in evidence in objectives, learning activities, and evaluation procedures emphasized in the teaching of reading. Specific issues include: (1) state mandated objectives in reading; (2) time on task for students when ongoing learning opportunities in reading are in evidence; (3) a logical versus a psychological curriculum; (4) extrinsic versus intrinsic motivation; and (5) observable results versus subjective means of evaluating learner progress. Definite recommendations are made pertaining to synthesizing each of these issues. Reading specialists and teachers should not go overboard in any one extreme in any of them. (RS)

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# Issues in the Reading Curriculum

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Running head: ISSUES IN READING

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# ISSUES IN THE READING CURRICULUM

Pros and cons are in evidence in objectives, learning activities, and evaluation procedures emphasized in the teaching of reading. It is a problem to harmonize diverse psychologies, philosophies, and opinions in the reading curriculum. This paper will focus its attention on issues with attempts made at harmonizing opposing points of view.

## State Mandated Objectives and Testing

Many states emphasize their written objectives in reading instruction mandated for pupil achievement. The objectives have been analyzed and chosen by selected educators within the state supervised by the state department of education. The philosophy involved in state mandated objectives is that key skills have been identified and need to be taught to students. It is believed that the state, rather than the district level or the classroom level, is in the best position to select goals for implementation in the classroom. Much criticism has been hurled at the number of people in society who have not been taught to read. Blame for this situation usually is given to teachers and the local school system.

With state mandated objectives, it is believed that a comprehensive set of goals will have been chosen so that individuals ultimately may become good readers. The goals are there for

teachers to emphasize in the teaching of pupils. The teacher then needs to select activities so that learners might attain the state mandated objectives.

Statewide tests are given at selected grade levels in order that pupils may reveal what has been learned. Test results are available to each school. Comparisons might be made among schools within a district and within school districts in a state. Many lay people and selected educators believe that these comparisons should be made to reveal which schools excel and which lack achievement.

Advocates of the state mandated tests believe that

1. measurable results need to be in evidence to reveal the quality of education being offered in a school or district.
2. lay people are satisfied with the quality of education if test results from students is positive.
3. objective, unbiased evidence needs to be in the offing to indicate learner achievement in reading. Test results provide objective data.

Critics of state mandated tests in reading state that

1. local initiative is stifled when states usurp more and more responsibilities of teaching pupils.
2. classroom teachers, professionally educated, are in the best position to make educational decisions pertaining to the teaching of reading.

3. unmotivated teachers of reading accrue when decision-making is taken out of their hands.

Pertaining to the debate involving state mandated objectives in the teaching of reading, the writer recommends that

1. teachers receive quality programs of preservice education to teach pupils to read well.
2. teachers be given much responsibility to select objectives, learning activities, and appraisal procedures so that individual differences among learners may be adequately provided for.
3. diverse means of appraising pupil achievement be utilized in addition to using standardized and state developed tests.

## Time on Task and the Reading Curriculum

Time on task has been a slogan in the teaching of pupils which includes the area of reading. It almost sounds as if pupils' wholehearted attention can be maintained continually on the learning activities provided for them. Objectives emphasizing intellectual tasks are significant. Certainly quality understandings, skills, and attitudinal goals are demanding for pupils to attain. Each learner needs to achieve optimally. Up to a point, a learner who concentrates fully on word attack skills and comprehension abilities should attain more optimally than a pupil who lacks attending to

vital learning opportunities. There are definite weaknesses in adhering to the concept of time on task, if this means pupils continually, with no letups, working to achieve in the area of reading. These weaknesses include basic needs which pupils have that may interfere with the time on task concept. These are the following:

1. hunger, rest, and variation of experiences need to be provided for.
2. acceptance and status needs for learners must be met.

The pupil in the curriculum area of reading is not an intellectual being alone. He/she also experiences physiological and emotional needs.

The writer recommends that

1. the concept of time on task be adequately understood by educators as well as by the lay public. No person can continually achieve in intellectual tasks such as reading without diversity of learning opportunities and experiences.
2. personal and social needs of pupils be met. Adequate nutrition and sleep, proper temperature readings and shelter, as well as acceptance and love from others are vital and necessary. These needs must be met if pupils are to achieve more optimally in reading.

## A Logical versus A Psychological Reading Curriculum

Numerous states, as well as school districts, require a management system of reading instruction. Precise, measurably stated objectives for pupils to achieve are then developed by committees of teachers and supervisors chosen for the task. The objectives are selected and written prior to teaching pupils in reading. The entire reading curriculum, or much of it, may center around pupils attaining the precise ends. If ninety measurably stated objectives are to be achieved by first grade pupils, a considerable amount of time will be given in the teaching of reading to have pupils achieve these goals.

A logical curriculum results if teachers and supervisors choose, prior to instruction, objectives in reading that learners are to attain. The ends may even be arranged by teachers and supervisors for learners to achieve sequentially.

Toward the other end of the continuum in the teaching of reading, a psychological curriculum may be in evidence. Ample opportunities exist for pupils to select their very own reading materials, such as library books. After the completion of a self-selected library book, the learner may decide how he/she wishes to be evaluated in terms of being able to identify words in reading,

comprehension skills, and fluency in being able to read well orally. The pupil is then involved heavily in sequencing experiences in the reading curriculum.

With the use of basal readers, in degrees, a psychological curriculum might also be emphasized. Ample opportunities in any reading lesson should then be given to having pupils identify problems and questions to be discussed. Sequence resides in the pupil and not in a management system with its predetermined objectives for students to attain.

In the debate of a logical versus a psychological reading curriculum, the writer recommends that

1. management systems of instruction be deemphasized. Pupils basically have no voice here in determining the scope and sequence of the reading curriculum.
2. emphasis be placed upon the gestalt theory of reading instruction. Thus, the whole child is involved in reading. The learner's interests, purposes, and goals are important to consider in developing a quality reading curriculum. Predetermined objectives in management systems of instruction tend to leave out the personal goals of pupils in reading.
3. educators rethink the goals, learning opportunities, and appraisal procedures in the teaching of reading. Should

other philosophies of reading instruction be stressed and incorporated, other than management systems of instruction?

## Extrinsic versus Intrinsic Motivation

How should students be motivated to achieve optimally in reading? Two points on opposite ends of the continuum need to be discussed. Toward one end of the continuum are educators who believe in extrinsic motivation. Primary (the actual prizes) and secondary reinforcers (tokens to be exchanged for the chosen prizes) are given by teachers to pupils for improved reading performance. The teacher needs to decide and convey meaningfully to students the number of precise objectives in reading to achieve to receive a primary or secondary reinforcer. The learner is encouraged to attain word recognition techniques or comprehension skills through a reward procedure. The reinforcers must be worth working toward on the part of the learner. To secure the reward, effort needs to be put forth in achieving one or more measurably stated objectives. Extrinsic rewards are then in the offing.

Toward the other end of the motivation continuum, learners read for its very own reward. The content in the story or book read is interesting and fascinating. Interest in reading makes for effort in comprehending sequential stories, content in library books, and

subject matter in basal readers. The joys of reading are their own inner satisfaction. From within the student, feelings of satisfaction and appreciation come from the reading of content.

Pertaining to the extrinsic/intrinsic debate in motivation, the writer recommends that

1. primary and secondary reinforcers be utilized only with students who cannot be motivated through positive means and methods of teaching reading.
2. inner satisfaction of reading be its own reward for students.
3. diverse methods of teaching be implemented whereby reading becomes its very own reward.
4. research be conducted on methods of teaching reading which intrinsically encourages students to do more reading.

Observable Results versus Subjective Appraisal Procedures

Behaviorism, as a psychology of learning, advocates that observable results only, count in terms of what students have learned. Test results, checklists, and observation scales which provide objective, verifiable data are desired. What is internal cannot be measured. The interests, purposes, and intrinsic goals of students are not measurable and thus not observable. Behaviorists then believe that test scores and observable results indicate if a

learner has or has not achieved a precise objective. It is an either/or situation. Either the student has or has not achieved a specific objective.

Toward the other end of the continuum of appraising student progress, humanism, as a psychology of learning, advocates that significant learnings acquired by learners cannot be measured. Lower levels of cognition only, according to humanists, lend themselves to verifying if a student has or has not achieved an objective. Humanists believe that internally, students have creative ideas, positive appreciations and attitudes, as well as skills in using the gross and finer muscles that do not always lend themselves to observable results. Perhaps, rarely or never can one observe what is intrinsic in terms of what has been learned by a student.

The writer recommends that

1. selected word recognition and comprehension skills be stated in measurable terms in the reading curriculum. These goals would emphasize basic word recognition and comprehension skills.
2. evaluation procedures allow much leaway to permit subjectivity to enter into appraisal situations. The personal meanings, motivations, purposes, and interests of students defy precise measurement.

3. diverse psychologies be utilized to evaluate student learning in reading. The meaning that a student brings to the reading situation is personal indeed. However, there are specific phonics, syllabication, and contextual word recognition skills which do permit rather objective appraisal by evaluators if a student has or has not been successful in goal attainment.

## In Closing

Specific issues have been discussed pertaining to the teaching of reading. These issues include

1. state mandated objectives in reading.
2. time on task for students when ongoing learning opportunities in reading are in evidence.
3. a logical versus a psychological curriculum.
4. extrinsic versus intrinsic motivation.
5. observable results versus subjective means of evaluating learner progress.

Definite recommendations were made pertaining to synthesizing each of the above named issues. The writer believes that reading specialists and teachers should not go overboard in any one extreme in the issues discussed in this paper.